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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

80 SEP 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: After Action Report on Central America Trip (U)

~~(S)~~ Attached is an excellent report by General Vessey on his recent trip to Central America. I heartily endorse his comments, particularly with regard to his recommendations at the conclusion of the report.

~~(S)~~ I would like to add a few remarks concerning some of the subjects covered in General Vessey's report:

- U.S.-Honduran Bilateral Negotiations. Of the two remaining agreements to be negotiated, the proposed military exercise agreement has been acceded to by both sides and is ready for signature. The draft proposal for an agreement on construction and use of Honduran installations and facilities is being staffed through our Embassy in Tegucigalpa.

- Replacement of Honduran Aircraft. The Air Force has been asked to study on a priority basis the options available regarding a Super Mystere replacement aircraft. An interim report is expected in November, with final recommendations due shortly thereafter.

Attachment

cc: Chief of Staff & Assistant
to the President
Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

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BY AS NARA, DATE 11/16/05

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OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON D.C. 20318

STANLEY R. MCNAUL

CM-1274-65
16 September 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Central America

1. ~~(S)~~ Early last week, I gave you an oral report of my Labor Day weekend trip to Central America (Panama, El Salvador, and Honduras) and most details have been well reported in the messages from our ambassadors in El Salvador, Honduras and Panama. Several points deserve special emphasis, and I will try to amplify them in the paragraphs which follow.
2. ~~(S)~~ General. Our basic policies for Central America are correct, and our pursuit of those policies is producing results. Over the past three years, the improvements in the security situation, in support for democratic institutions and in the general confidence of the civil and military leaders are dramatic. On the other hand, we should not lull ourselves into a false sense of security. The economic situation continues to be difficult in all countries. Duarte has not yet moved social and economic improvements in behind the improved security. The political situation in Panama, Guatemala, and to a lesser extent in Honduras is fragile. Nicaragua is the great political and security cloud on the horizon for all. Central America needs our continued attention. We have come about six inches on a yardstick, and we need to capitalize on our success. My general message to the presidents and military leaders of the countries visited was one of support and cooperation. I also told them that after observing U.S. attitudes toward Central America for some time I had come to the conclusion that two ingredients were necessary to earn the unqualified support of the Congress and the American people, the first being support of growing democratic institutions and the second being a strong stand against the intrusion of communism and the Soviets and their Cuban surrogates. In all countries I visited, I found general concern about a lack of focus of our Nicaraguan policies. The presidents and military leaders in each country pointed out the need for a broader political "offensive" against Nicaragua, but that hope for a solely military solution with present levels of support for the Contras was unrealistic. A broader diplomatic and political offensive could engender added

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support for the Contras and open other avenues for change in Nicaragua. All pointed out that worsening economic and social conditions in Nicaragua seem to be virtually unnoticed and unpublishized in the rest of the world, including the U.S.

3. (S) El Salvador. A success story by any standards. The security situation has improved dramatically. Duarte and his military leaders have grown. They have a realistic view of their problems, but they're also confident and know they are on the right track. Duarte responded to my chiding about failure to move governmental institutions in behind his military successes by accepting responsibility and outlined plans for doing so. The most heartening part of the visit with Duarte was having him lay out his proposal for a border settlement with Honduras. The key point in his proposal is offering Honduras an opening to the sea through the Gulf of Fonseca. It looks to be a genuine, serious proposal. Duarte has done a lot of work to get Salvadoran political support for it, and he deserves our help. On the security side, the insurgents are losing, but they are moving more and more to urban terrorism. The Salvadorans urgently need our help for their police and security forces in handling the urban security problem while the military forces are exploiting their success in the field. Now is not the time to contemplate reducing security assistance for El Salvador.

4. (S) Honduras. President Suazo's term is coming to an end, and he seems to have accepted that fact and will support the elections in an orderly turnover of government. We need to work hard to settle a number of issues with Honduras in these last months of Suazo's term. The most urgent is the Contra support mechanism. The Hondurans continue to be wary of the Contra issue; they want to oppose the Nicaraguans, but they want to succeed. They do not want to be left supporting an unsuccessful Contra action or any combination of political and military actions which leave them with a powerful, unfriendly communist neighbor. We need to sort out of procedures for dealing with the Contras when the Boland amendment expires. We need to have agreement with Honduras on how the procedures will work in Honduras, and we need to have them working smoothly before Suazo leaves office. We also have a number of pending bilateral arrangements in the security field that must be completed and operational before Suazo departs. We finally got a draft of the military exercise agreement back to Honduras during my visit. We need to complete the Status of Forces Agreement work and the "Repair of Facilities" Agreement. The closer we get to the Honduran election the more likely we are to have trouble with all those issues. We also need to get on with deciding how to help Honduras replace the Super Mysteres in their Air Force. The actual replacement need not be made for another four or five years, but starting to work with the Hondurans now will assuage a lot of their concerns

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and make solving other problems easier. President Suazo showed the first signs of cautious optimism I've ever seen from him on the prospects for solving the border problem without going to the World Court in December. Within about three hours, I had heard the presidents of both countries say, "There is hope, and we need to solve it in the next two months." They deserve all the help we can give them.

5. ~~(PST)~~ Panama. The political situation in Panama is worrisome. President Barletta seems to lack the political acumen to maintain the confidence of the leaders of the Panama Defense Forces, nor does he seem to know how to explain his economic policies to the Panamanian people. Noriega and the PDF, on the other hand, don't want to risk the support of the people in confrontations over economic policies which they're not sure will work. I engaged in plain talk with both Barletta and General Noriega. I urged Barletta to build support in the security forces and to communicate with Noriega. I told Noriega that a military coup would endanger support from the U.S. and that he needed to work to help the Barletta government succeed. Both acknowledged the messages, but both have limits. We will need to watch it carefully. Ambassador Briggs is alert to the dangers.

6. ~~(C)~~ Our People. The United States has good people in the top positions in Central America. General Galvin has the confidence of the political and military leaders in the region and he also has the confidence of our ambassadors in the region. I had a chance to visit with our new ambassadors in El Salvador (Corr) and Honduras (Ferch). Both seem well-prepared for their posts and have a good understanding of the need for close cooperation between State and Defense if our policies are to succeed.

7. ~~(PST)~~ Recommendations

a. Bud McFarlane should convene a high-level group from Defense, JCS, State and CIA to work out the Contra support policies and procedures. The policies and procedures should then be confirmed at an NSPG meeting.

b. I believe we need a new Central American Policy NSDD incorporating a revitalized diplomatic, political, military approach to the Nicaraguan people.

c. We need to complete the remaining outstanding bilateral agreements with Honduras quickly. Recommend that you call the matter to the attention of Secretary Shultz and that a time table be set for completing U.S. work.

d. The U.S. government should examine ways to help and encourage El Salvador and Honduras to solve the border problem before it is referred to the World Court.

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e. We need to give help quickly to the Salvadoran Police in dealing with the urban terrorism problem. The kidnapping of President Duarte's daughter ought to be trigger enough to get on with emergency help.

f. A last recommendation is to continue to improve the coordination among State, Defense and CIA in Central America. Much improvement has been made over the past three years. A pair of very good CINCs, Gorman and Galvin, and some very good ambassadors have made it happen. Experience tells me that all that can change quickly unless the Washington leadership nurtures coordination and a regional approach.


JOHN W. VESSEY, JR.
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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WITHDRAWAL SHEET
Ronald Reagan Library

Collection: North, Oliver L.: Files

Archivist: dblb

File Folder: V.P.'s Trip to Guatemala, Oct 4, 1985 - Oliver L. North, NSC Staff Safe#1535616, Drawer 1, Box 1

Date: 05/13/97

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
1. Letter	Letter from General Mejia to Reagan, 5 p. (Spanish) R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #193	9/3/85	P1
2. Attachment	Letter attached to #1, 3 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #194	9/2/85	P1
3. Attachment	Chart attached to #1, 1 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #195	9/2/85	P1
4. Letter	State-English translation of #1, 5 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #196	9/3/85	P1
5. Attachments	State-English translation of #2/#3, 4 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #197	9/2/85	P1
6. Letter	Copy of #4, 5 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #198	9/3/85	P1
7. Attachments	Copy of #5, 4 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #199	9/2/85	P1
8. Letter	Copy of #1, 5 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #200	9/3/85	P1
9. Attachment	Copy of #2, 3 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #201	9/2/85	P1
10. Attachment	Copy of #3, 1 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #202	9/2/85	P1
11. Cable	Cable of President Reagan response to Mejia letter of July 13, 1985, 3 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #203	9/3/85	P1
12. Memo	From Weinberger to the President, re: Ailler Action Report on Central America Trip, 1 p. R 11/1/85 1/383 #9	9/30/85	P1 P5
13. Memo	From John Vessey to Weinberger, re: Cent. Am., 4 p. R 11/1/85 1/410	9/16/85	P1 P5
14. Memo	re: Guatemala, 1 p. PAR 4 4/22/82 1/96 0561 #204	10/1/85	P1 b3
15. Report	re: Guatemala, 1 p. PAR 4	n.d.	P1, b3
16. Note	re: Guatemala, 1 p. R	n.d.	P1
17. Email	From Wiggs to North, re: Guatemala, 1 p. R 10/7/95 NLSF95-0561 #205	10/2/85	P1

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - 44 U.S.C. 2804(e)

P-1. National security is classified information [(b)(1) of the PRA]

P-2. Relates to departmental, Executive Office [b(2)(C)] of the PRA

P-3. Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the PRA]

P-4. Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(b)(4) of the PRA]

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